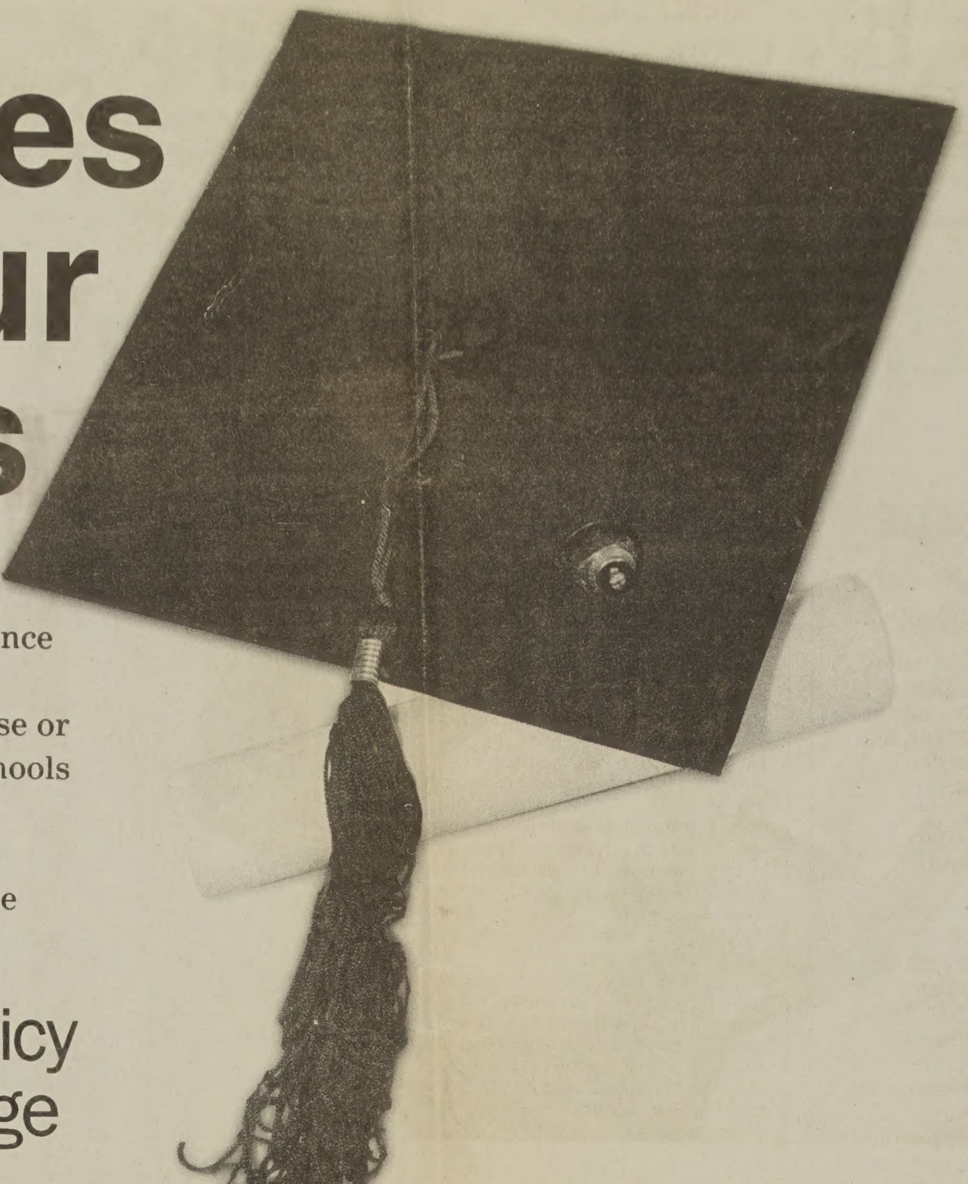
Values in our schools



District 11's school board has been asked to adopt a sexual conduct policy that promotes abstinence and affirms heterosexual marriage.

Does our diverse society share these or other common values? Should our schools be the place to teach them? Should students have the right to express opinions — and criticism — about the policies?

Sexual conduct policy sends right message

By **Will Perkins**

Promote abstinence. Discourage promiscuity. Affirm traditional marriage. These three positions are all we have asked the District 11 school board to ratify in order to provide an over-arching policy statement defining the goals of the district. Our primary objective is to better support our children as they make the serious choices that often affect their lives.

Perkins

To us, it seems a reasonable proposition. The empirical evidence supporting the positive social and health benefits of these positions is indisputable. To the 7,500 and counting who have formally endorsed this position before the board, it seems a reasonable proposition. They desire a district that will publicly reinforce the standards and values they seek to establish in their homes.

However, our detractors find the proposed sexual conduct policy unreasonable. They claim we seek to censor freedom of student press. Yet, we've clearly stated this would not attempt to conflict with existing state law, which is very clear about protecting free speech.

They claim we've constructed a thinly veiled plot to persecute homosexuals. Yet, our proposal calls for discouraging promiscuity of every sort and refers to marriage only in the manner currently prescribed by state law.

They say we seek to impose religious views on others. Yet, nothing in our proposal contains any mention of religion or endorses anything not widely accepted by liberals and conservatives alike as principles that strengthen a society.

They charge that we seek to limit what students are allowed to discuss and debate. Yet, what we have asked for is a clarification on what positions the faculty endorses, not discusses, in the classroom.

They say we don't need such propositions — that they already exist in the form of sexual education curriculum and implicitly extend elsewhere. If so, then why not explicitly codify them?

There are those who will point out that this policy will leave some out in the cold. We admit that every values-based policy will have its opponents, and this is certainly a values-based policy. However, these values do not stem from hate, bigotry or antagonism. Rather, we maintain, these are positive mainstream values which the majority of taxpayers can willingly support. What else can we ask of a pluralistic society? And what, except standard-less nihilism, have our critics offered instead?

Our issue has never been with the Lever staff or District 11 students. We do not seek to squelch discussion on the difficult issues our youth face in today's complex society. Rather, we contend it is only proper that the school district provide some guidelines and policy-affirming practices which will strengthen our future generations. Our parents need assistance, not opposition, from public education in developing the character of our youth. Our community doesn't need more problems stemming from illegitimate pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases and fragmented families.

We need positive, not reticent, measures from our District 11 leaders. Promote abstinence. Discourage promiscuity. Affirm traditional marriage. By consolidating the fragments of the sexual conduct policy, which the board says does exist, into a comprehensive policy that applies whenever sexual conduct is the topic, the board will ally themselves with the broad majority of this community and protect the children in the process.

Perkins is chairman of the board of Colorado for Family Values.

Whose traditions to follow?

By **F. Mike Miles**

In times of rapid change, people instinctively seek something to hold on to. They drop anchor, fearing to be set adrift in waves of new technology and shifting mores.

It seems we need the firmness of tradition to help us make sense of the world, to help us deal with new information or the unfamiliar — the communications explosion, geneticism, immigrants resisting assimilation, homosexuality. Tradition is important.

Miles

Thus, the "traditional values" supported by Colorado for Family Values resonate in many members of this community. Anger towards homosexuality seems to be one manifestation of CFV's attempt to keep their tradition intact and undoubtedly seems justified from their point of view. But such a point of view is based on fear and invalid claims to be the keepers of shared values.

Tradition is important, but whose values are we to follow? Had we been lured by the siren song of traditional values we would have denied women the right to vote and would have denied them the opportunity to proudly serve our country as pilots and astronauts.

Traditional values drove Native Americans onto reservations. A lot of pain has been inflicted on minorities everywhere because of inflexible adherence to someone's or some group's traditional values.

The keepers of these sorts of traditional values should consider the transiency of some of their present views. Our history respects not tradition based on provincial customs, but that which reflects the breadth of this nation's peoples. Our history respects not the values of an era, but those that have spoken to generations of Americans as free people.

Tradition is important, but I know of no traditional values that have endured except the ones based on justice and humanity. And while I hold all "traditional values" suspect, I support those embedded in the oldest written Constitution still in use, the United States Constitution: a Constitution in which free speech is guaranteed and equal protection under the law sacrosanct.

I support a way of life backed by a system of law and numerous Supreme Court decisions that have protected minorities from oppression and injustice. I support the values voiced centuries ago by a prophet who welcomed both Jews and gentiles, the weak and oppressed, warning men not to reject the commandment of God for the sake of blind transaction.

"Whose traditional values?" is a question this community will continually face as it grows. Issues such as District 11's student publication policy and, perhaps now, a student conduct policy will test our core philosophy with regard to fundamental rights and values. Other issues concerning minorities and disadvantaged will also test our support for human rights. Now, as society becomes more diverse and its problems more complex, it is even more important to approach the question of values from a broad perspective. Let us hoist anchors, not drop them. Let us put to sea with sails of tolerance and rudders crafted by the common good.

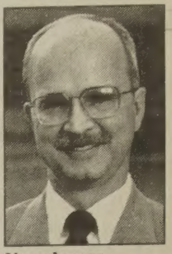
Now is the time for leadership. District 11's school board showed leadership in drafting a student publication policy that will preserve freedom of expression for students. As a community, we need other leaders who will take a similar stand for human rights. We need leaders who will enter the debate on the side of justice and humanity. For in the absence of true leadership by elected officials, the community will be dominated by those with money and personal agendas. And the "traditional values" they promote will bring injustices to many.

Miles is vice chairman of the Pikes Peak Human Relations Coalition and teaches advanced government and economics at Fountain-Fort Carson High School.

Affirm chastity and free press

By **L. Martin Nussbaum**

Several years ago Focus on the Family ran an advertisement in national papers entitled, "In Defense of a Little Virginity." Focus is still defending virginity, and so am I. The question before our community now is not whether students should be sexually active but whether we should cut down the civil liberties to defend public virtue.



Nussbaum

An October 1996 article in the Palmer High School Lever on the lives of teen-aged homosexuals has caused some to question whether student editors should enjoy editorial liberty to publish such pieces if School District 11 endorses an abstinence-based sexual education policy. Others question whether the district should endorse any sexual values. In fact, it is both possible and desirable simutaneously to promote chastity and preserve a free student press.

My law school professor, Dean Mark Yudof, correctly observed that a school cannot *not* inculcate values. Even if it sought to, a school cannot remain value neutral. Because this is so, schools should carefully consider which values to inculcate and thoughtfully determine strategies for persuading students to make those values their own while crushing those who dissent.

Most public schools consciously inculcate the values of honesty and punctuality. They inculcate values of sobriety, industry and equality. If schools can inculcate these values, they certainly ought to also inculcate the value of chastity. Teen promiscuity and teen pregnancy are social and moral scourges. They destroy relationships, spread deadly STDs, drive the demand for abortion and beget a generation of unfathered and underparented children. If District 11 teaches the risks of smoking, drinking and drug use, it ought also teach the greater harms arising from casual coupling.

Why should student journalists be allowed to dissent from and even to criticize policies and values endorsed by a government school? Why should those teaching the value of chastity allow their students to publish criticism of the value? A few clarifications help.

First, public high school journalists generally do not have a constitutional right to freedom of the press because the press right is "owned" by the school district as publisher and not by the students themselves. The Colorado Legislature has, however, restored a free student press by granting student journalists substantial editorial freedom. This statute bars a school district from restricting the content student articles except when those articles are defamatory, false, or obscene; or when they promote gang activity, unlawful acts or invasion of others' privacy.

Second, civil liberties are difficult to appreciate because their exercise often offends. Some believe that churches and the Sunday morning traffic they bring should be zoned out of nice neighborhoods. Others think school principals should bar student editors from writing about homosexual students. Legal protections for speech, press and religion mean that speech, press and religion are allowed existence and expression even when they offend a constituency.

Third, the boundaries of student journalists' editorial discretion ought not automatically coincide with the substance of each district-endorsed policy. The district has at least an unstated policy of not favoring one religion over another. Yet one Lever editor this year wrote lovingly of her Methodist Church and another endorsed Catholic education.

Freedom of the press, like freedom of religion and freedom of speech, should be understood in part as a truce between warring factions. It is a truce which allows each faction to exist. Lincoln got it right when he said that those "who deny freedom to others deserve it not for themselves."

Civil liberties protect the competition of ideas which, in turn, allows truth to emerge. There are knowable truths even in a pluralistic society. Smoking is unhealthy. Racial bigotry is wrong. Teen promiscuity is disastrous. If a District 11 abstinence policy is wise and true, students openly discussing and questioning and writing about that policy cannot defeat that wisdom and truth. Our schools should be safe places for such discussions, safe places where those who appropriate the schools' values and those who respectfully dissent from them know they are welcome.

Nussbaum is a Colorado Springs attorney whose practice emphasizes religious liberty issues. He is also the father of the Lever's editor in chief.

go! TODAY

BEST BETS

THAT'S WHAT FRIENDS ARE FOR: Big Ass Biscuit, Hazy Swirl, Ed Three Eagles and other friends perform a benefit rock concert for Mike Littledeer, 2 p.m., Laura Belle's Lounge, 734 N. 19th St. $8; 630-7600.

ENGLISH ORGAN SCHOLAR: Philip Scriven is in concert, 6:30 p.m., First Presbyterian Church, 219 E. Bijou St. Free; 471-3763.

THE WORD AS MUSIC: Soundscapes and Poetry West present music and poetry by and about women, 3 p.m., Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center, 30 W. Dale St. $6; 634-7470.

Praise of 'Shine' doesn't dim

Aussie's long road to making movie ends in success

By **Warren Epstein**
Gazette Telegraph

MOVIES

Australian director Scott Hicks thought he knew about success when his Discovery Channel documentary about submarines, "Sharks of Steel," won an Emmy.

He didn't know squat.

Now that Hicks' first feature film, "Shine," has established itself as one of the hottest crossover art films of the season, here's what success looks like: seven Academy Award nominations, including one for best picture.

This comes after the film took a best picture award from the National Board of Review, best actor (Geoffrey Rush) awards from the Golden Globes and the Los Angeles and New York film critics, and numerous honors at film festivals.

"It's been incredible," Hicks said before a typically well-received screening at the Denver Film Festival in October.

The idea for "Shine" came from a small news story he read in his local paper in Adelaide, Australia, about a decade ago. It told about an unusual pianist, David Helfgott, who was giving a comeback concert years after his nervous breakdown.

"I went to the concert and was amazed by what I saw," Hicks said. "The gap between the personality of this man, who is so eccentric and off the wall, and the virtuosity of his performance was remarkable. The more I looked into his life, the more remarkable his story became."

After the concert, Hicks asked Helfgott and his wife if he could make a movie based on his story. Only after a year of imploring did Hicks get their permission.

That delay in getting the Helfgotts onboard foreshadowed what would be a long, difficult journey toward putting "Shine" on film.

The biggest stumbling block was money. A story about a child prodigy driven mad by his music and his father's cruelty just didn't sound sexy enough for major studios and big investors. After casting the major roles, it took Hicks nearly six years to raise the $4.5 million shoestring budget (most from the BBC) he needed to make the film.

To Australian stage actor Rush, who plays the grown Helfgott, the delays made for a better film.

"It gave me a lot of time for extra preparations," Rush said during the publicity tour stop in Denver. "It was wonderful spending time with David socially. I'd be at his house eating lunch and watch him out the window, running naked in the distance.

Fine Line Features

Geoffrey Rush plays pianist David Helfgott and Lynn Redgrave plays the astrologer who falls in love with him, eccentricities and all, in the movie "Shine." The 45-year-old Rush, who hadn't played piano since he was 14, took an intense refresher course: "I considered it like learning to sword fight if you're doing 'Hamlet.' It's part of the job description." He calls Helfgott "an amazing man."

Hicks: Took director years to raise budget for "Shine."

"He's an amazing man," he said. "He would play Beethoven with one hand and gesture with the other while chatting about his dog."

Portraying this man would be one of the more challenging assignments in Rush's career. Although Helfgott would provide almost all the music in the film, Rush wanted to at least be able to fake piano playing. He didn't want a hand double.

The 45-year-old actor hadn't played piano since he was 14, so he took an intense refresher course.

"I considered it like learning to sword fight if you're doing 'Hamlet.' It's part of the job description."

Ultimately, he was satisfied with the authentic look of his playing, though he's glad the pianos on the set didn't work.

"Nobody would want my soundtrack," he said. "Believe me."

Approximating Helfgott's babbling, stream-of-consciousness speech pattern proved to be even trickier. Rush studied it by listening to a tape containing 10 hours of Helfgott talking. He calls the tape "the Berlitz How to Speak David in 10 Easy Lessons."

Here's a short excerpt of a typical Helfgott monologue used in the opening scene of "Shine":

"Live and let live, that's very important isn't it, Sylvia, then again life's a struggle, isn't it, to survive, to live, to survive, to survive undamaged and not destroy any living breathing creature."

After Rush learned the speech pattern, he struggled to keep his performance from seeming a goofy impersonation or worse, a rip-off of Dustin Hoffman's character in "Rainman."

"You must constantly redefine what becomes cliche," Rush said. "If you don't have a different set of references, people will say, 'Oh, I know that mental disorder.' And it's easy to push it away.

"David refers to his disorder as 'the damage.' There's something universal about that. Everybody has been damaged in some way. It's part of the wear and tear of the journey you take."

The journey of Helfgott's life certainly had its share of wear and tear. Although some of his siblings have criticized the film as being less than accurate, particularly in its depiction of their father as cruel and abusive, there's little argument that Helfgott had a hard life.

The pressures and expectations of being a child prodigy weighed heavily on him. In the film, Helfgott gives his most challenging performance of Rachmaninoff's notoriously difficult Piano Concerto No. 3, then collapses.

Director and writer Hicks acknowledges that Helfgott's breakdown happened over the course of years. He used creative license to make a point.

"The story I wanted to tell was about the artist's struggle," Hicks said. "I wanted to show somebody not only playing the piano but virtually consumed by it, coming apart and never recovering."

While Helfgott is never "cured," though, he does find redemption, acceptance and love.

"It's really quite an uplifting story," Hicks said. "And it's a curious working of fate that let it happen."

Another curious working of fate is the movie's phenomenal critical success. The movie that Hollywood refused to fund has become the darling of American critics.

The praise from movie reviewers is music to Hicks' ears. But it's not quite as sweet as the praise from Helfgott himself.

He saw "Shine" as soon as it was finished and called it, "the best film I've seen since 'Ben-Hur.' "

To Hicks, that's what real success is all about.

Helfgott recording lacking passion

By **Mark Arnest**
Gazette Telegraph

REVIEW

Ordinarily, this recording would go unnoticed in the classical bin. It's the pianist's first recording, and the Rachmaninoff works he plays verge on the hackneyed: the Third Piano Concerto, four preludes, and the second sonata.

But this disc is different. The pianist is David Helfgott, recently immortalized by actor Geoffrey Rush in the award-winning movie "Shine," and his debut recording is the hottest classical record in decades, with a shot at becoming the best-selling classical recording of all time.

The reason for this isn't Helfgott's playing, but the story of his descent into — and ascent from — madness, which "Shine" tells so compellingly. BMG's label plays up this soul-odyssey angle, proclaiming, "Hear Helfgott perform the most crucial repertoire of his life."

But sadly, these performances don't deliver the goods, and the hoped-for divine madness is missing. The playing is earnest and plodding — not to mention sloppier than would be acceptable in any other aspiring concert artist. Helfgott may indeed feel this music deeply, but he fails to communicate his passion to the listener.

It's too early to write Helfgott off as a pianist, though. He was a prodigy, and apparently possesses real talent. (In "Shine," he's compared to Roger Woodward, who's twice the pianist Helfgott is, but, ironically, has no recording contract.) And, for the first time in decades, Helfgott is working regularly with a coach, Mikhail Solovei, to help him reproduce the sound he imagines. "His intentions are wonderful," Solovei told the New York Times, "but he just needs a little more control so that he produces what he is hearing in his head."

Those who yearn for divine madness in Rachmaninoff's Third Concerto have a few choices. The easiest is Vladimir Horowitz's classic 1951 RCA recording with Fritz Reiner, which sizzles from beginning to end (but steer clear of his 1978 live recording). Those who demand the most modern sound should find Martha Argerich's Philips recording, which features this volatile pianist at her most thrilling. And the composer's own 1939 recording, though poorly recorded, remains an eloquent statement by one of the century's greatest musicians.

Mark Arnest is the Gazette Telegraph's classical music critic.

'Genius and madness' make up the theme of pianist's life

By **Seth Mydans**
N.Y. Times News Service

PROFILE

PENRITH, Australia — Shoes off, head bowed nearly to the keyboard, David Helfgott winds his way back and forth through the phrases of a Chopin prelude, singing, sighing, making buzzing noises with his mouth, talking to himself.

"Keep playing, keep playing," he murmurs, his eyes half closed. "You're playing nice now. Gentle. Gentle. La la la la. Just play every note and you'll be fine. Smile, smile, smile. Image is everything. Image is everything. At least you're playing well. If you're playing well, you can survive now, so what's this fear of the future? Zhhhhhhh."

Transported by the music, he lifts a free hand to conduct himself and smiles.

This is a recording session, and the auditorium of the Joan Sutherland Per-

Pianist David Helfgott is preparing for an American tour beginning in March.

seats are populated by his ghosts, and he plays to them.

"Papachka," he says, referring to his late father, the man whose obsessive love and cruelty were inescapable elements of his upbringing. "Papachka thought it should be different. Well,

point, if there is a point."

In recent weeks Helfgott's troubled past has returned in force to transform his life. A biographical movie about him, "Shine," is a critical hit, and suddenly Helfgott is at the center of attention. He seems to love it.

He is here in the darkened auditorium, recording tracks for a second compact disc of his music, and as soon as he stops playing, he is surrounded by his manager, his piano coach, his wife and a television crew that is preparing a report in advance of an American tour beginning in March.

Helfgott has stopped playing, but he remains in motion, shuffling rapidly from one person to another like a fly bouncing from one lighted windowpane to another. "Awesome, awesome, America is awesome," he murmurs. "You'll be fine. You'll be fine. The worry's the killer; the worry's the big killer, isn't it. Don't worry. Don't worry."

over the past" and said it seemed to have lifted some of the burden of pain from his shoulders.

"Genius and madness," she said, describing a theme of the movie and of her husband's life. "

"Shine," directed by Scott Hicks and released by Fine Line, has been embraced by audiences for its deft and often humorous depiction of artistic obsession and the crushing of a psyche. As a result, Helfgott's concerts in Australia have become sellouts, and a recording of his music has climbed high on both classical and pop music charts in the United States and Britain.

The crucial trauma of Helfgott's youth seems to have occurred when his father blocked an invitation from the violinist Isaac Stern for the boy to study music in the United States. When the teen-age David did leave at last to study at the Royal College of Music in London, his father disowned him.

Months later, after a successful per-

Rachmaninoff, Helfgott suffered a mental breakdown that sent him into institutions. Doctors gave him electroshock therapy and for years forbade him to play the piano.

Gillian Helfgott said she had a tape of her husband playing when he first returned to the instrument. "The sadness and pain and wandering are dreadful to listen to," she said.

Improbably, the movie has a happy ending as Helfgott begins to come to terms with the memory of his father and settles into a loving relationship with his wife, an astrologer 15 years his senior. Just as improbably, this story has another happy sequel, as he seems to be thriving on the publicity and fascination with his life that the film has produced.

Helfgott remains on a medication called Seranace for a psychological disorder that doctors have found difficult to name. "He is not schizophrenic or manic-depressive," Gillian Helfgott